

WHO AM I?

Eddie stumbles up to me, not yet in control of his tiny feet. He smacks me, intrigued, before smiling – his dimples apparent – accepting me. “It me?” he manages to say. Even in my jealousy, I can justify the attention he commands. As his shadow lengthens, I find myself watching him, in love, as each season is dragged to its conclusion.

Eddie is crying, has been for ten minutes now, he’s lost his lego. Looking at me: I show him its position in the corner. No more tears.

Before I can focus on him fully, he is tying his school tie and pulling me a face, so I pull one back, before he leaves me for a whole day. I do not speak, but lucky for her, I don’t laugh either – she isn’t what she imagines herself to be. I tell her the truth and she rewards me with her back. Before any further reflections, she’s out the door and off to work. Dad rocks up with his usual carefree demeanour, before, he too, is off.

Who am I, for them to confide in me more than each other? Eddie spills about his new girlfriend whilst Dad gushes about his promotion. But not Mum. I put her together every morning, but when she gets home she falls back apart; she’s lying to herself and she wants me to lie to her too. I can’t help but tell the truth.

From time to time, Eddie tells me that school is tough, but he continues nevertheless without accumulating so much as a second glance of worry from our family. Dad dances for me, whilst Eddie uses his brush for a microphone. Yes, his brush – forever similes at me, contradicting Mum’s glances of disapproval.

I bide my time, pensive in thought. Once along, their faces are often replaced by a plaster wall onto which I project my feelings. The photos opposite me are laced with cracks and an abundance of markings. I entertain myself in that the shades of blue change in front of me, enhancing the aesthetic of my single view.

I will listen to Dad’s monologues for hours, speeches as he prepares for work, speaking of things I’ll never see, using words that hold no meaning in my world. Though when I point out his mistakes, dissatisfied, he seeks an alternative audience.

Mum appears one day, mad, eyes swollen, beseeching. Her hand rises, her fingers reaching out. I brace myself to feel her warmth, “Yes!” I think. “She understands,” but her hand falls as if she has touched something cold, unpleasant. Is this what I have become to her? I am part of her; we are identical and yet I am found to be repulsive?

Her arms aren’t composed by her sides, but rather with hands alternatively wringing, clenching her fists. Composure gone. Her maternal worry is clear through the fresh film over her fixed gaze. Dad is on the phone behind her and in seconds unfamiliar faces floor the room. Invasive flashes of blue light bounce off my plasterboard companion.

Eddie? Eddie? Maybe he's lost something again...why can't I find him? I want him to dance for me, sing to me, entrust to me his secrets.

This family, my kin, to whom I am intrinsically bound: What do they see in me? What am I to them? Faithful, honest, true: but never quite enough, my honesty is never enough, and they favour each other's lies and half-truths.

The picture frames adjacent to the world I am not a part of have gone ... the room is stripped bare. Through all our hardships, they looked to me for answers and now they're leaving me because I got them wrong. You must build someone up to truly take them apart, and there, I can see the last piece; Eddie's Lego as mum removes the couch. I know now why conversation is scarce; their silence is just another word for their pain.

"Let's go now" urges Dad. The lines on Mum's face bear a lifetime of burdens – my doing. Broken by the years, and exhausted by living in a constant state of fight or flight, Mum looks at me for the first time in forever: a broken soul.

"Are we bothering to take this old mirror?" and with that, I break too.